

# THE DUEL

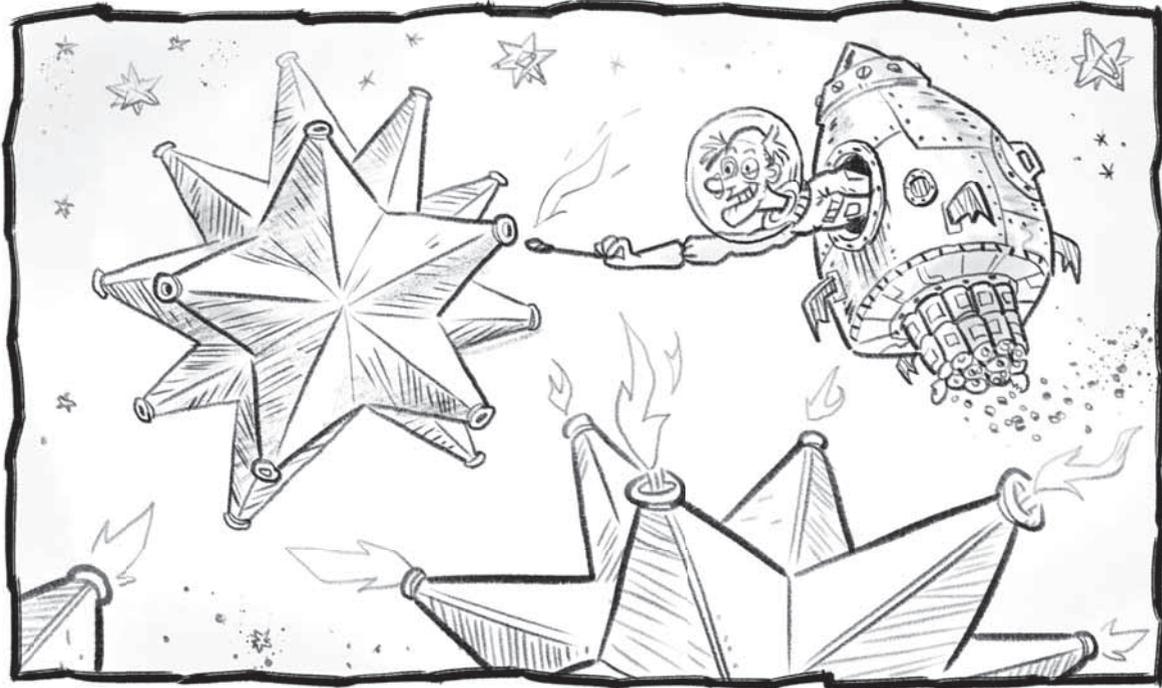
## The Inventors Awaken

by Simon Cooke

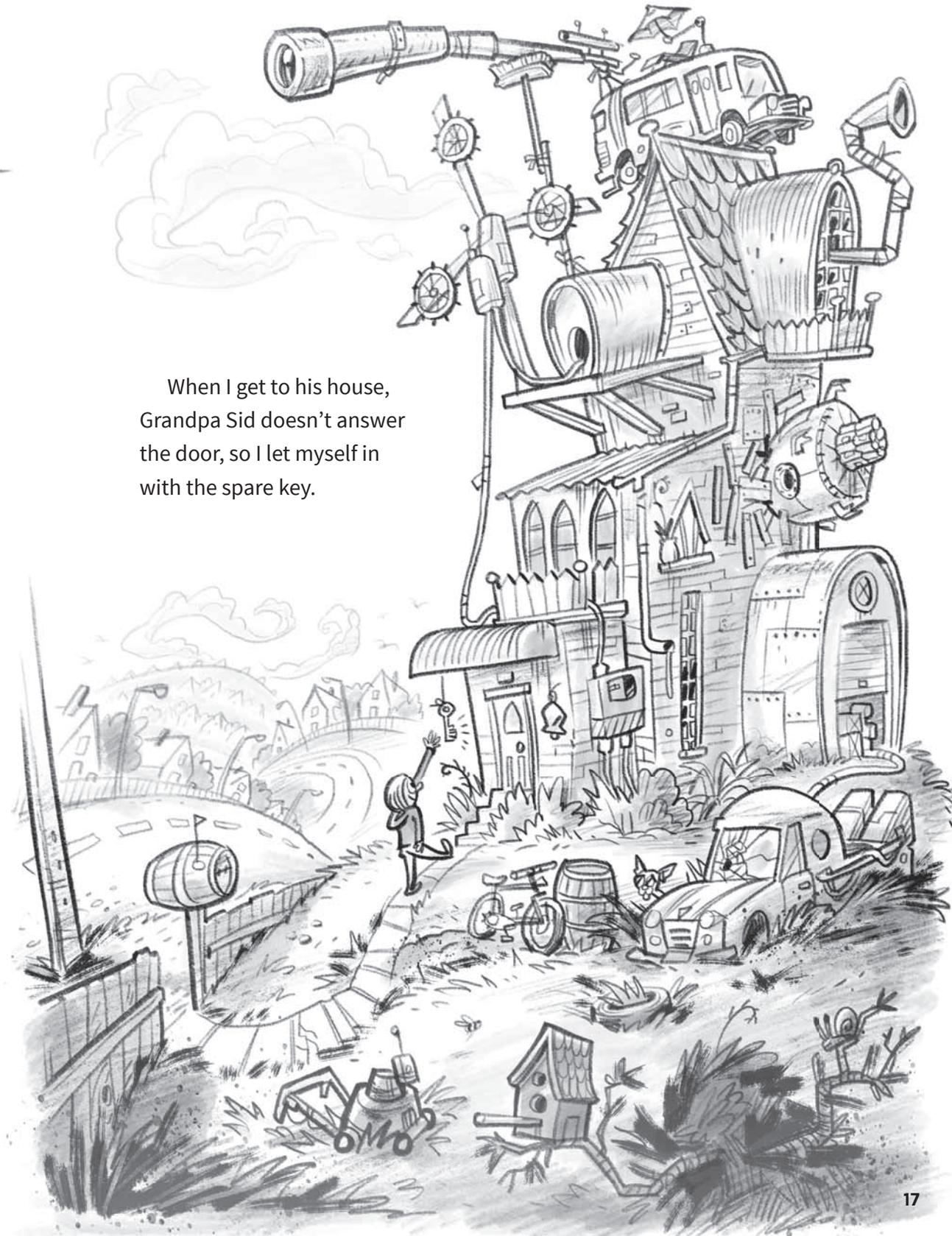
“Something’s upsetting your grandpa,” Mum says when I get home from school. “He’s flatter than a pancake. I think you should go over.”

That doesn’t sound like Grandpa Sid. He has more fizz-bang than a fireworks display. “I’ll bike over right now,” I say.

If you don’t know already, my grandpa’s an inventor. He came up with the ideas for the moon and the stars and then rocket ships so we could explore them. He also invented handstands, Saturdays, and furless cats (an accident for which he later apologised).



When I get to his house, Grandpa Sid doesn’t answer the door, so I let myself in with the spare key.



The house feels unfamiliar. Usually it's filled with the noise of Grandpa Sid working, but today, it's strangely quiet. I check in the Inventing Room, but he's not there. I find him in the Thinking Room. He looks very sad, and I give him an extra-big hug. I'm not sure who invented hugs, but whoever did was a genius – almost as clever as Grandpa Sid.



“What’s the matter, Grandpa?” I ask.

“It’s a very long story,” he says. “Have I ever told you how I got started as an inventor?”

I shake my head. It’s one story he hasn’t told me.

“A long time ago,” Grandpa Sid begins, “before you and your mother were born, people just sat in caves grunting. One day I decided enough was enough – we needed a system! So I invented words that had meaning, and I called this system language.” Grandpa Sid smiles broadly at the memory.

“It’s a good system, too,” I say.

“It is,” Grandpa Sid agrees. “Language is how people communicate ideas. Language allows invention. In fact, you could argue that I invented invention,” he adds modestly.

“You really could,” I agree. After all, I’m here to cheer him up.

“I mean think about it,” Grandpa Sid continues. “Invention is about ideas – and ideas build on ideas. Take cars, for example. If someone hadn’t thought about wheels, cars wouldn’t be much use, eh?”



“And what is soccer without the invention of the soccer ball?  
And campfires without fire?”



“Imagine inventors trying to invent those things without language!”

“It would be impossible,” I agree. “So, what did you invent after language?” I ask this because I know Grandpa Sid wants me to.

Grandpa Sid looks happier as he remembers. "Lots of things. Sausages, socks, and singing." He winks at me. "And let's not forget noses. I invented those for health and safety reasons ..."



"Did you invent *everything*?" I ask.

"Not quite," says Grandpa Sid. "I soon realised that I couldn't keep up with demand. So I invented special institutes for training other inventors. It was the best of ideas; it was the worst of ideas."

"Why, Grandpa Sid?"

"Well, in the years that followed, the human race gained many wonderful things. But not all inventors – or their inventions – are good, Emma. I worked alongside Baron von Spanner, a talented student I'd recruited to become my apprentice. I thought we were a team, but one day, I woke to find I was wrong. While I slept, that dastardly von Spanner had invented chains and padlocks, and he used them against me."

Baron von Spanner? I'd never heard of him.

"You'd think it was the end for me – that Baron von Spanner had won," says Grandpa Sid, "but you'd be wrong. I invented escapology!"

"Way to go, Grandpa Sid," I say, offering my hand for a high-five. But Grandpa Sid shakes his head.



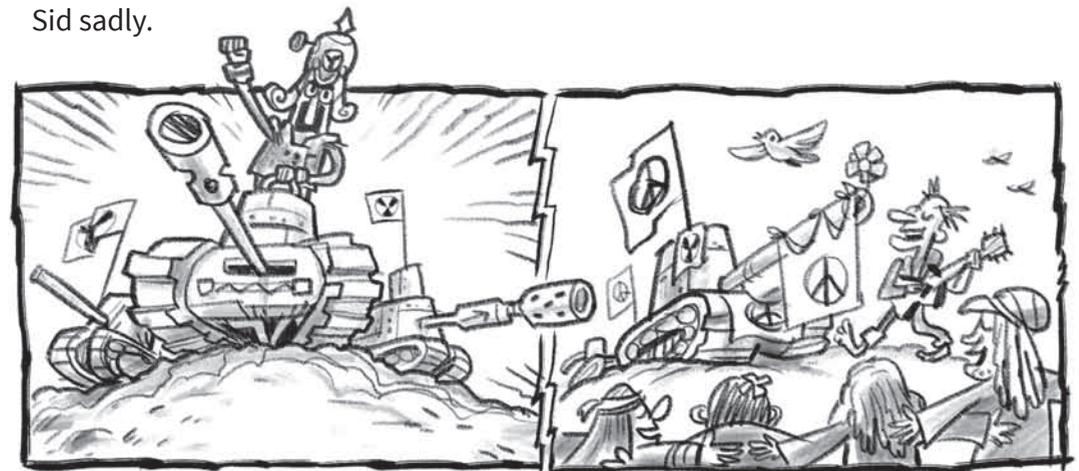
"Unfortunately, when I was finally free, I saw that my problems weren't over. While I'd been imprisoned, von Spanner had invented machines that polluted the air ... the ground ... the water. It was an environmental disaster! Any lesser person would have found a cave and gone back to grunting – but I couldn't. I was the only person who stood between the world and its destruction. So I did the obvious."

There is no obvious with Grandpa Sid, so I just nod.

"I challenged von Spanner to an inventors' duel."

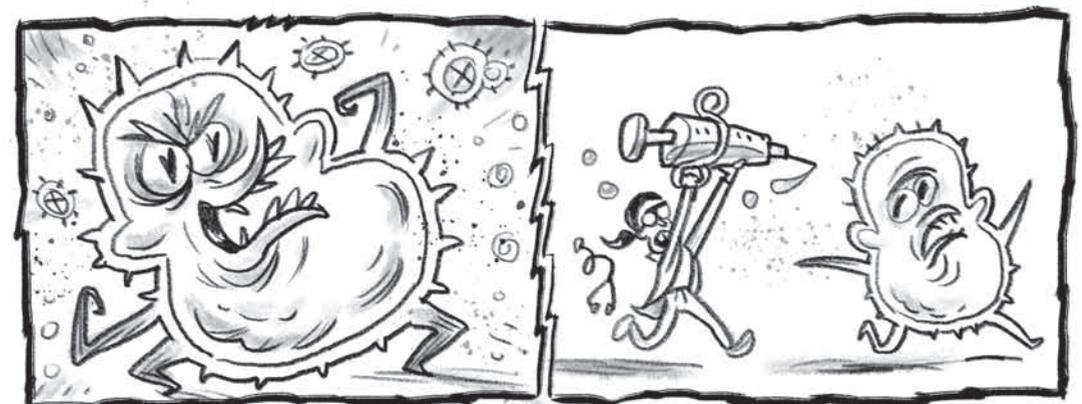
"What's an inventors' duel?" I ask.

"It's what happens when all hope of negotiation has gone," says Grandpa Sid sadly.



"Baron von Spanner started the duel by inventing war.

So I invented peace.



He invented disease.

So I invented medicine.

“For every idea von Spanner came up with, I neutralised it with one of my own. On and on it went ...” Grandpa Sid takes a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his forehead.

“What happened to Baron von Spanner?” I ask. “How did you get rid of him?”

“Rid of him?” says Grandpa Sid. He looks at me sadly. “I didn’t. And just this week he’s made contact after years of silence. Von Spanner wants another challenge – winner takes all. That man’s onto something big, I can feel it. He wouldn’t have challenged me otherwise – and I can’t stop him.”

I don’t believe this. Grandpa Sid can do anything. “You can’t give up, Grandpa,” I say. “You’re the greatest inventor in the world – better than Baron von Spanner will ever be.”

“Thanks, Emma,” says Grandpa Sid, “but I’m tired. I’m running out of ideas. Who knows what von Spanner will come up with next? A device to heat Earth’s atmosphere and cook us all?”

“Then you’ll invent a device to cool us down,” I say.



“What if he breeds giant cockroaches that eat everything, including the kitchen sink?” says Grandpa Sid.



“Then you’ll invent cockroach-eating kitchen sinks,” I reply.



“But what if he invents a popple-dopple-ate-a-nator?” asks Grandpa Sid.

“I don’t even know what that is,” I say.

“Neither do I!” Grandpa Sid grins. His mood has suddenly changed.

“But congratulations. The job’s yours. You’ll be perfect!”

“What job?” I have no idea what he’s talking about.

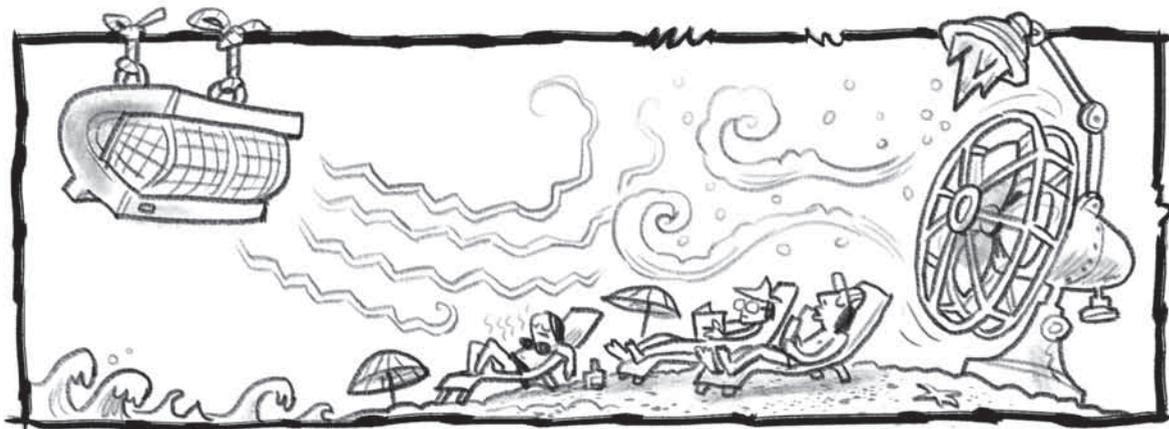
“My apprentice,” says Grandpa Sid.

“Me?” Strictly speaking, Grandpa Sid already has an apprentice – but I decide now’s not the time to remind him.

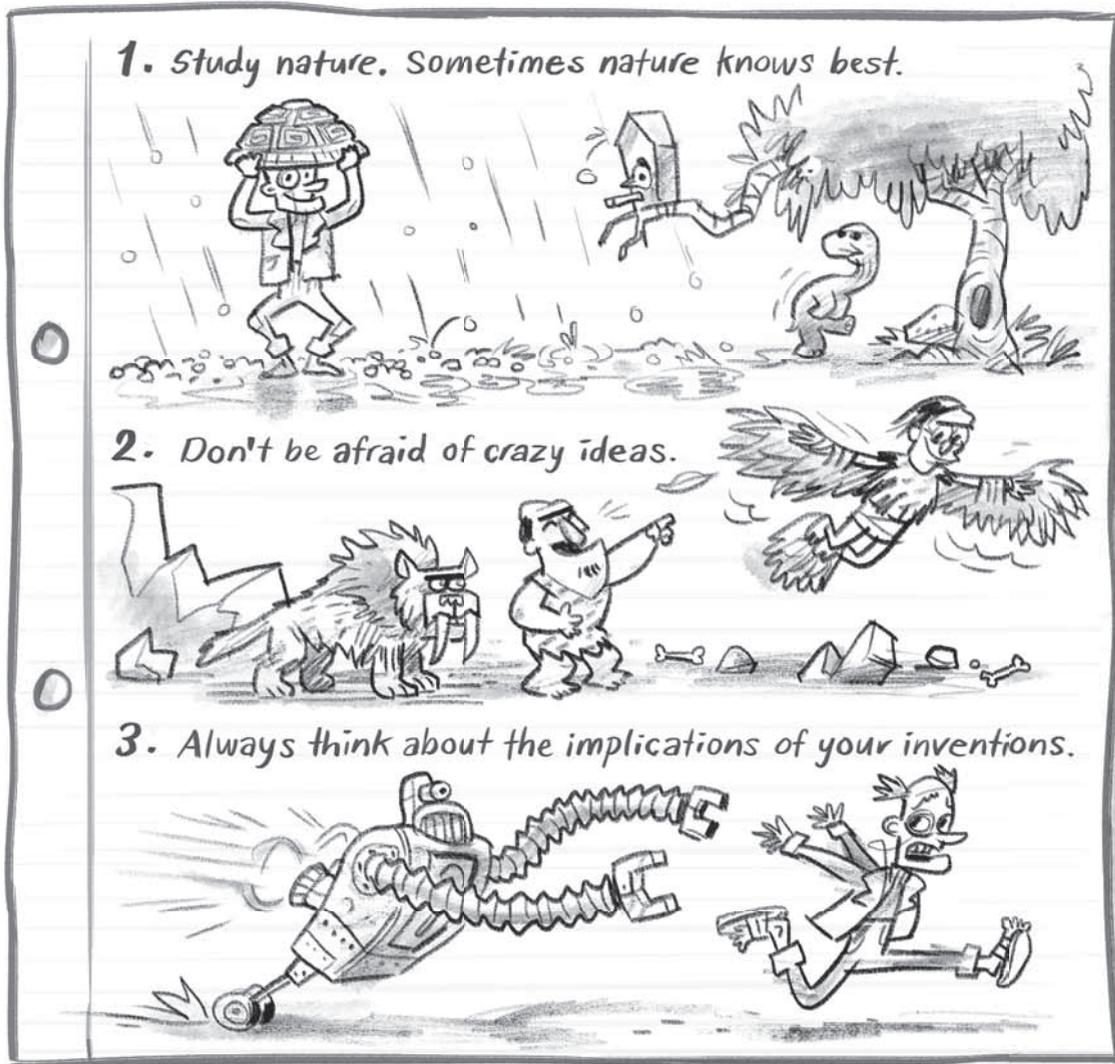
“Why not?” says Grandpa Sid. “You’re smart, aren’t you?”

I nod cautiously.

“Good. If we’re to vanquish von Spanner forever, you’ll need to be very smart. Let’s start your training right away,” Grandpa says, jumping up.



“There are three fundamental rules for inventors,” Grandpa Sid says.



“Baron von Spanner never thinks about lesson number three,” says Grandpa Sid. “Worse – he doesn’t care. Always care, Emma. That’s very important.”

“I will, Grandpa,” I promise.

Grandpa Sid hands me a notebook. “Every inventor should have one of these to write down their ideas,” he says. “Keep it on hand. You never know when inspiration will tap you on the shoulder.”

Grandpa Sid now has a spring back in his step and a sparkle in his eye. I decide it’s OK to go home and get to work.

“Come back tomorrow,” says Grandpa Sid. “And don’t be late. We have work to do.”

I squeeze my notebook into my back pocket and jump on my bike, the ideas already fizz-banging in my brain like fireworks. Who knows what will happen next ...\*



illustrations by Gavin Mouldey

\* If you want to know what happens next, look out for the August 2016 Level 3 School Journal.

# The Duel: The Inventors Awaken

by Simon Cooke

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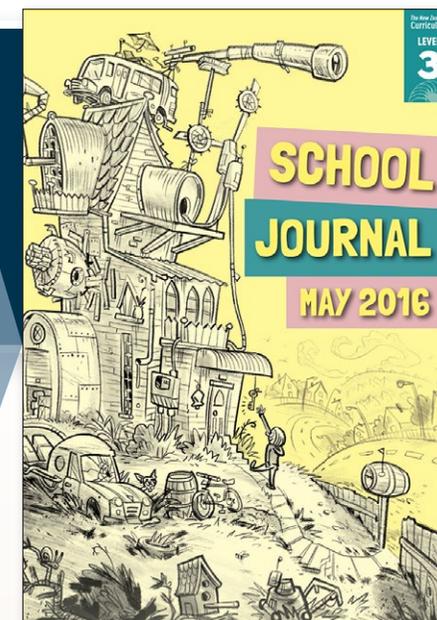
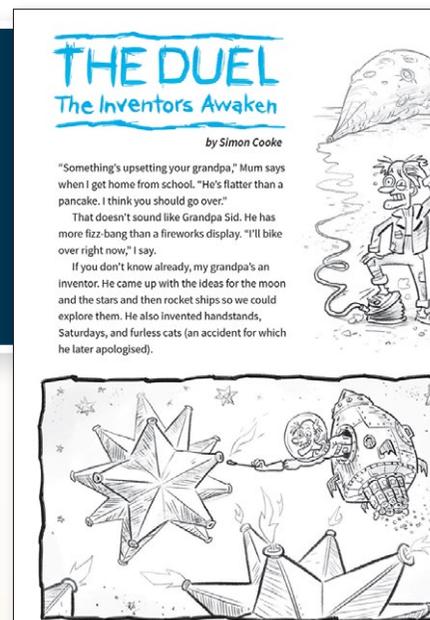
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